

19. NOTES ON THE SKIN SLOUGHING OF RETICULATED PYTHON IN CAPTIVITY

The periodicity of sloughing of skin in the snake is a well known fact and varies according to the sex, age and seasons. It is more frequent in summer and less during the colder seasons. According to Deoras (1965) the inter sloughing period varies usually 72 to 210 days in the snakes. But study of sloughing in Pythons under captivity has shown specific differences in the two species, *Python molurus molurus* Linn. and *P. reticulatus* (Schneider). So far we have not come across of any detailed sloughing record of Reticulated Python. Records of sloughing of this species was maintained continuously for two years at the Nandankanan Biological Park, Orissa.

A female Reticulated Python measuring approximately $1\frac{1}{2}$ metres was procured on 8-iv-69 for the Park. Sloughing of skin of this snake was observed for two years from May 1973 to April 1975. The snake measured 404 cm on 13-viii-73 and later 435 cm with a circumference of 41 cm at the thickest part on 21-i-75. Within this two years period it sloughed 20 times and the inter-sloughing period varied from 22 to 105 days, being longest between 12th November, 1974 to 26th-28th February,

1975. At another time the duration was 56 days from 2nd December, 1973 to 28th January, 1974. Just before sloughing the body colour turns dull and the covering of the eyes becomes milky white. The snake becomes inactive and generally refuses to feed. For the completion of the process sometimes it takes two or three days and the outer epidermal layer is cast off by bits starting from the tip of the nose. After the sloughing the snake looks brighter, becomes active and accepts food.

Further the above measurements show that in 4 years 4 months it grew 254 cm but in the last two years it grew in length only 31 cm. It is interesting that the interval between sloughs was 50 days in the winter of 1974, 105 days in the winter of 1975.

Biswas & Acharjyo in a separate publication which is in press, have observed the inter-sloughing period of two adult *Python molurus* as 37 to 128 and 31 to 97 + ? days respectively. Here also the inter-sloughing period has been noted to be longer in the winter and in the case of a female when it was incubating. The variations of inter-sloughing period is lower in *P. reticulatus* than *P. molurus*.

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